

*Valley Historical Review*, XLII (1956), 621-52. Recent monographs on special topics of Puritan interest are: Babette May Levy, *Preaching in the First Half Century of New England History* (Hartford, Conn.: American Society of Church History, 1945); Marion L. Starkey, *The Devel in Massachusetts: A Modern Inquiry into the Salem Witch Trials* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1949); Emil Oberholzer, Jr., *Delinquent Saints: Disciplinary Action in the Early Congregational Churches of Massachusetts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956); and Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Essays on Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Boston: Boston Public Library, 1944). The political aftermath that followed the great period of Puritan dominance in New England may be studied in Robert E. Brown, *Middle-Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts, 1691-1780* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1955). His thesis that Massachusetts was more democratic than we have previously believed is also set forth in "Democracy in Colonial Massachusetts," *New England Quarterly*, XXV (1952), 291-313, and "Economic Democracy Before the Constitution," *American Quarterly*, VII (1955), 257-74.

The Southern colonies received general consideration in Wesley F. Craven, *The Southern Colonies in the Seventeenth Century, 1607-1689*, Vol. I of *A History of the South* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1949). Two new state histories devoted significant space to the colonial period: Hugh T. Lefler and Albert R. Newsome, *North Carolina, The History of a Southern State* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1954) and David D. Wallace, *South Carolina, A Short History, 1520-1948* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1951). Two colonial histories of Virginia have been reprinted: Robert Beverley, *The History and Present State of Virginia* (1705), edited by Louis B. Wright (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1947) and Hugh Jones, *The Present State of Virginia* (1724), edited by Richard L. Morton (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1956). Virginians, like New Englanders, continue to attract the interest of historians. A useful analysis of Virginia politics will be found in Charles S. Sydnor's *Gentlemen Freeholders: Political Practices*

# NEW INTERPRETATIONS OF AMERICAN COLONIAL HISTORY

*by*

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## NEW INTERPRETATIONS OF AMERICAN COLONIAL HISTORY

Selected Writings Since World War II

*By Louis B. Wright*

In the years since the close of World War II, interest in the history of the world beyond our own borders has grown as our international responsibilities have increased. By the same token, a new interest in the more distant backgrounds of American history is apparent, and fresh studies of the colonial period have appeared. The influences that have stimulated the interest in colonial history are varied and have operated on more than one level.

On the level of the casual tourist, the restoration and reconstruction of the architectural relics of colonial times have focussed attention upon periods of history that most travellers never before knew or cared about. The best advertised of these reconstructions, of course, is Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., a flourishing enterprise that attempts to simulate life as it was lived in the old Virginia capital, even to dressing the attendants at the restored houses in the costumes of the period. Although it is impossible to avoid an anachronistic jar when a woman in crinolines drives to her work at the Raleigh Tavern in a modern car or a restaurant waiter garbed in plum-colored knee breeches pedals up on a bicycle, the public clearly likes the show and receives some stimulation of the imagination.

The historical picture conjured up by the perfection of the restoration of course is unrealistic, for at no time in its previous history was Williamsburg ever so neat, clean, painted, and polished. But a successful tourist attraction cannot reproduce the town as it was, with its dusty or muddy streets, its clutter of horse-drawn vehicles, its swarm of mangy dogs, and the rank odor of rotting fishheads and other garbage piled behind the taverns. In general the colonial period was neither clean nor fastidious. If Colonial Williamsburg, Inc. has given the public a fanciful no-

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JUN 18 '71

tion of colonial elegance, it nevertheless has served a useful purpose in making vivid another age and in creating a desire in many people to know more about that past.

Some of the less pretentious restorations of colonial buildings have been more faithful to the spirit of history. For instance, the restoration of George Mason's house, "Gunston Hall," does not glorify an elegance that never existed but reconstructs the setting of a typical upper-class planter of the period before the Revolution. Many of the restorations of colonial houses in New England have also been faithful to history.

For historians and all others who have a concern for the accuracy of history as revealed in the physical relics of the past, the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum at Wilmington is the most important undertaking of this kind in the country. In this great museum one can see typical rooms with the characteristic furnishings and decorations of the locality and period that they represent. The institution is designed to foster an interest in the past and to assist the serious student in reaching an accurate understanding of the physical aspects of life in America throughout the colonial period and indeed down to 1850. Under the general editorship of Charles F. Montgomery, director of the Winterthur Museum, the editors of *Life* magazine brought out a picture book in color entitled *America's Arts and Skills* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1957) which emphasized the early periods.

Popular interest in the romantic aspects of colonial history has received a further stimulation from various pageants and celebrations staged at historic localities since World War II. The most "literary" and the most successful of the pageants was Paul Green's *The Lost Colony* describing Raleigh's colonial efforts. The celebration of the 350th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, the reconstruction of the three original ships that brought the colonists, the commercialized re-building of the "Mayflower" and its well-publicized trip across the Atlantic, and the steady stream of popular novels on colonial subjects all illustrate the general interest in the early days of settlement. A valuable by-product of the Jamestown celebration is a series of pamphlets on colonial Virginia under the editorship of E. G. Swem, *Jamestown 350th Anniversary Historical Pamphlets* (23 vols.; Williamsburg: Vir-

ginia 350th Anniversary Celebration Corp., 1957). These essays include such diverse topics as "Virginia Architecture in the Seventeenth Century" by H. C. Forman; "Medicine in Virginia, 1607-1699," by Thomas P. Hughes; "Some Notes on Shipbuilding and Shipping in Colonial Virginia," by Cerinda W. Evans; "Religious Life of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century," by G. M. Brydon; and a variety of others giving information about the political and social life of the period.

On the scholarly level, important publications in colonial history have appeared since 1945. One of the most valuable developments has been the start of a program for the publication of significant bodies of documents. This movement was stimulated by the appearance in 1950 of the first volume of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950) under the editorship of Julian Boyd with Lyman H. Butterfield and Mina R. Bryan as associate editors. At a ceremony at the Library of Congress, where he received a copy of the first volume, President Truman urged the National Historical Publications Commission to use its efforts to bring about the editing of other historical papers on a similar scale. Among the large editorial projects that reach back into the colonial period the most important after the Jefferson Papers are the Benjamin Franklin Papers under the editorship of Leonard Labaree, a joint enterprise of Yale University and the American Philosophical Society, and the Adams Papers, under the editorship of Lyman H. Butterfield at the Massachusetts Historical Society. Among the most important collections of colonial state papers hitherto unpublished are those for South Carolina which are being published under the editorship of J. H. Easterby by the South Carolina Archives Department.

The use of colonial newspapers, one of the most important sources of information, has been made much easier by the publication of the monumental work of Clarence S. Brigham, *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690-1820* (2 vols.; Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1947). Practically complete runs of the *Virginia Gazette*, the *South Carolina Gazette*, and the *Pennsylvania Gazette* have been made available in microfilm. *The Virginia Gazette Index, 1736-1780* (2 vols.;

Williamsburg: Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1950), compiled by Lester J. Cappon and Stella F. Duff, provides an invaluable key to the subject matter of this newspaper. An indication of the variety of material for social history in a colonial newspaper may be seen in Hennig Cohen, *The South Carolina Gazette, 1732-1775* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1953). In addition to newspapers in microfilm, a variety of source material for colonial history is being made available in microfilm by University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan, and in microprint under the editorship of Clifford K. Shipton with the cooperation of the American Antiquarian Society by the Readex Microprint Corporation. The Microprint project states as its objective "the complete text of every existent book, pamphlet, and broadside printed in the United States from 1639 to the end of the year 1800. Keyed to Evans' *American Bibliography* and supplements of titles not covered in Evans [it will reproduce] more than 30,000 titles." The University Microfilms project is more selective but it covers much the same material and comprises thousands of titles.

The activity of the Institute of Early American History and Culture has been an important factor in stimulating the study of colonial history in the past fifteen years. Sponsored jointly by the College of William and Mary and Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., it has given substance and enduring value to the activities at Williamsburg. Under the successive directorships of Hunter Farish, Carl Bridenbaugh, Lyman Butterfield, and Lester Cappon, the Institute has fostered the publication of both original source material and works of historical interpretation. It has been responsible for the expansion of *The William and Mary Quarterly* into the most significant journal dealing with early American history. Practically every important book in colonial history receives a competent review in this journal, and the original articles are contributions of value. One of the most interesting issues of the *Quarterly* (April 1954) was devoted to the theme, "Scotland and America."

The principal writings in colonial history since World War II reflect the interests of historians in the broader aspects of culture. Although local historical societies often quite naturally concern

themselves with the antiquarian investigation of a particular region, professional historians have shown an increasing tendency to interpret regional culture in relation to its overseas origins and to other regions of the country. The emphasis upon political and institutional history which marked the earlier investigations of the colonial period culminated a few years before the war in the exhaustive studies of Charles M. Andrews which he summed up in *The Colonial Period of American History* (4 vols.; New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1934-1938). Despite the immense amount of detail in Andrew's volumes, there is little about the kind of life that a colonist lived, his daily work, the food he ate, the house he lived in, his recreations, or his intellectual and social interests. But some of the older historians were already investigating these matters. Thomas J. Wertenbaker attempted a synthesis of his own and other studies in a work bearing the general title of *The Founding of American Civilization* (3 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938-47), which devoted more space than previous general histories had given to such subjects as architecture, farming, trade, intellectual interests, education, and religion.

The study of the intellectual aspects of colonial civilization received an impetus in the years before the war from the publication of Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Founding of Harvard College* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1935), *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century* (2 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936), and *The Puritan Pronaos* (New York: New York University Press, 1935; reissued in 1956 as *The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England*). Morison's analysis of educational theory and practice showed the value of investigating European and British backgrounds as a clue to American conditions.

A general treatment of the intellectual history of the colonies appears in Merle Curti's highly useful survey, *The Growth of American Thought* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943) which contains valuable bibliographical suggestions. A more recent survey of all the colonies is Louis B. Wright, *The Cultural Life of the American Colonies, 1607-1763* in the New American Nation Series (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), which also attempts



to provide selected bibliographies by subjects. Another general discussion is Max Savelle, *Seeds of Liberty* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1948). A provocative essay on the social ideas of the colonists will be found in Leonard W. Labaree, *Conservatism in Early American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1948).

A pattern for the consideration of varied aspects of social history is evident in several able books published by Carl Bridenbaugh. Before the war he brought out *Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625-1742* (New York: Ronald Press, 1938; reissued by Alfred Knopf, Inc., 1955). The next book was *Rebels and Gentlemen: Philadelphia in the Age of Franklin* by Carl and Jessica Bridenbaugh (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1942). The final volume in the study of urban society in the colonies was *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-1776* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1955). These three volumes describe in multifarious detail the routine of the life in the principal towns of the Atlantic seaboard: Boston, Newport, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston. Bridenbaugh is also the author of significant monographs on special subjects, the most significant being *Peter Harrison: First American Architect* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1949) and *The Colonial Craftsman* (New York: New York University Press, 1950). Less successful was *Myths and Realities: Societies of the Colonial South* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), which sets forth conclusions with which many historians of the period would quarrel as, for example, that men like Madison and Jefferson were "biological sports in the Chesapeake Society" which was for the most part uncouth and illiterate.

Puritanism and the Puritans continue as themes of enduring interest for scholars. The more recent studies avoid the temptation to berate the Puritans for their alleged illiberality and confine themselves to more objective analyses of what they believed, what they did, and what they meant in colonial life. An excellent study of a Puritan who played a role on both sides of the Atlantic is Raymond P. Stearns, *The Strenuous Puritan: Hugh Peter, 1598-1660* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1954). Every student of this subject should read William Haller's *Liberty and*

*Reformation in the Puritan Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955). Haller's earlier study, *The Rise of Puritanism*, which is fundamental to an understanding of Puritan thought on either side of the Atlantic, has been reissued in a paperback (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957). The stoutest defense of the sweet reasonableness of the New England Puritans has come from Clifford K. Shipton in various essays, best exemplified perhaps in "Puritanism and Modern Democracy," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, CI (1947), 181-98. A résumé of well-known concepts of Puritanism will be found in six lectures by Alan Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), described by Christopher Hill in a notice in the *English Historical Review*, LXXII (1957), 173-74, as "clear, if over-simplified summaries of the outlook of the various Puritan groups."

In the area of Puritan theology, Perry Miller has carried on investigations that have had a widespread influence upon later commentators. Perhaps Miller's most provocative single study of the federal theology of the Massachusetts Bay Puritans is to be found in "The Marrow of Puritan Divinity," republished in his volume of collected essays, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956). His three books, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1933), *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1939); and *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), concentrate upon the interests of the professional clergy with an analysis of the theological ideas of the dominant Puritans in England and New England. For a more generalized understanding of ideas in early America, the reader will find useful Herbert W. Schneider, *A History of American Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946).

The preoccupation with coldly rational theology has sometimes obscured other aspects of Puritanism. An excellent essay that deals with another side of the religious manifestation of the Puritans is J. F. Maclear's "'The Heart of New England Rent': The Mystical Element in Early Puritan History," *The Mississippi*